

## If the Fates Allow by falafelfiction

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**Relationships:** Dustin Henderson & Nancy Wheeler, Dustin Henderson/Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Steve Harrington & Dustin Henderson, Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler, Will Byers/Mike Wheeler

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**Summary:**

Lost Scenes from the Snow Ball seen through the eyes of Dustin. A collection of bittersweet memories from the boy who cried at his first school dance. Mostly sweet though. The party are back together after all.

## If the Fates Allow

### Author's Note:

I started writing this late on Christmas Day but I've only just got around to finishing it. Since writing my S1 ensemble fic, I'd been wanting another crack at writing Dustin POV, especially as I got such a positive response to his chapter of my 'Once We're Done Monster Hunting' story. Dustin just seemed like the perfect 'bard' to tell the story of the Snow Ball. This is far less angsty than my previous fics. It's practically flangst with lots of shipper service for multiple pairings.

Enjoy and happy holidays!

### Saturday 15th December, 8.20pm...

“Hey Steve...does it always take that long to do your hair?”

Dustin really shouldn't have left the hairstyle till last. Steve had come to collect him for the Snow Ball at 7.30pm. It was a little after eight before they'd hit the road. Dustin had let Steve make small talk with his mom in the living room for a good fifteen minutes before admitting defeat and calling to his new friend and surrogate big brother for assistance. Even Steve himself, who was such an expert on the Farrah Fawcett spray he could've taken a job selling it door to door, had struggled to tame Dustin's unruly mop of curls.

“You just need practice,” said Steve as he drove. “You have to get into a routine with it.”

“Well, that organic shampoo just made my hair really frizzy,” Dustin complained. He checked his watch again. “*Shit*, I'm almost an hour late!”

“Fashionably late, my friend,” Steve assured him. “Don't worry, that's the best way to be. That means you'll get to make an entrance. You'll breeze in there and turn all the ladies heads. Trust me...you're going

to knock em dead.”

“You...you think so?” asked Dustin, still scratching behind his ears. The spray had made his scalp itch. He was worried he might be allergic to it.

“Hey, what did I say? Stop touching it!” Steve took his hand off the wheel for a moment to slap Dustin’s fingers away from his carefully sculpted pompadour. “And yeah, you’re going to score tonight. Big time. I guarantee it. You’ve learned from the master, kiddo. Just... just don’t set your sights on that little redhead chick, okay?”

“I know. I’m young. I gotta play the field.”

“Yes! That’s the attitude, buddy. That right there.”

Dustin nodded, forcing a smile. Lucas wasn’t officially taking Max as his date. Officially they were all going together as friends, just for the fun of it. None of them had ever been to the annual Snow Ball before. In the past they had ruled as a party that it was too cheesy for them, even though the real reason had been their collective fear that the four of them would spend the night sitting alone at a table, never getting asked to dance or finding the courage to ask anyone themselves. But this was their last year of Middle School. There was going to be even more pressures on them to have some manner of social lives once they reached Hawkins High. They might as well start getting used to it.

Of course, there was another reason they were going to the Snow Ball this year and that was because of a promise Mike had made when they were hiding in a science classroom with a Demogorgon rampaging through the halls. Mike had promised the girl who had saved their butts that he’d take her to the dance. Just over a month ago El had saved all their lives again. So supporting Mike in fulfilling his promise was really the least they could do. Even though none of them were certain that El was even going to be at the ball tonight. They knew the Chief had been trying to make arrangements. That he’d been consulting with Mr Clarke to see if he’d allow entry for a kid who didn’t attend their school. But they still didn’t know for sure if it was safe for El to come out of hiding. They were well aware that if Hopper felt it was too risky then he’d be keeping her back at the

cabin. They were hopeful though. They were wanting to see her walk in through those gym doors.

“It doesn’t matter if I get lucky,” Dustin said out loud. “Tonight’s for Eleven.”

“Hey, come on, tonight’s for all you little shitheads...” Steve said affectionately. “I mean, seriously. You’ve earned it. You kids deserve a break from the stress of saving this town from supernatural invasions.” He slapped Dustin on the shoulder like they were players on the same sports team. “So this thing finishes around ten, right?”

“Yeah. You sure you’re okay to drive me back?”

“Of course, it’s no trouble. Actually I was thinking I’d sit out in the parking lot and get some studying done. There’s too many distractions at home right now...” Steve patted a satchel by his feet. “I brought along those physics books you got out of the library for me. Tonight I’m going to tackle thermodynamics and electromagnetism...”

“Great!” Dustin enthused. “I’ll quiz you on the ride home.”

Steve nodded, wincing a little. Dustin knew it embarrassed Steve that he was a senior, struggling through his final year who’d resorted to being tutored by a middle schooler. But Dustin really liked teaching Steve all the things that the older boy had somehow missed in his Science classes. And in his History classes. And in Maths and English too. Just because Steve wasn’t book smart it didn’t mean that Dustin didn’t look up to him. If they’d been playing baseball or field hockey then Dustin was the one who’d be struggling. It’s not like Steve didn’t have other talents. It wasn’t like Steve wasn’t teaching him things too. Yeah, they could teach each other a lot about very different kinds of electricity.

Dustin sighed. He knew all about that other kind of electricity now. He’d felt it surging between Lucas and Max and it’d struck like a lightning bolt when Mike and El were reunited that night in the Byers house. Dustin wondered if he’d feel its sparks himself tonight. He was ready for it. The music was humming in the car and it was putting him in the mood to dance.

"I like this song," said Dustin, turning up the car stereo. "Bowie, right?"

"Yeah, I think so," Steve shrugged. "Jonathan made me the tape."

"That's cool," he said, because it really was cool that Steve and Jonathan were on good terms after everything. Dustin shut his eyes and sat back, letting the lyrics of the song sweep over him. It was a song about changes and strain and getting older.

*...and these children that you spit on...  
...as they try to change their worlds,  
...are immune to your consultations...  
...they're quite aware of what they're going through...  
...Ch-ch-ch-ch-changes....*

**8.55pm...**

"Hey Nancy....do you want some chocolate pudding?"

Dustin had shared four dances with Mike's sister before she'd finally returned to the refreshment counter to find the punch bowl empty. Dustin had followed her to the school cafeteria, offering to help her mix up a new batch of the festive cocktail she'd called *Pure Fuel*. No alcohol went into it, but Dustin saw there was enough fizz, syrup and caffeine in the brew to keep any middle schooler high as kite all evening. Dustin had wondered if he might find any more fun ingredients to add by raiding the fridge.

Finding the pudding had distracted him. It was still being hoarded.

"Put that back, doofus!" Nancy chided. "You're supposed to be helping, not stealing."

"Hey, it's lunch lady Philips who's stealing it from us!" Dustin protested, peeling back the ring pull on the can in his hand. "The government provides these snacks for our sustenance and she's been holding them back. I'm just taking what's mine."

Nancy smiled, shaking her head. "You're a teenage rebel in the

making, Henderson. Just wait till you get to Hawkins High. You're gonna rule the school."

Dustin smiled too, spooning the pudding into his mouth as he wandered back to the table where Nancy was mixing her punch. "It's going to be so weird next year. Passing you and Jonathan in the halls all the time. Will you pretend like you don't know us?"

"No, I won't," she assured him. "The old Nancy Wheeler might have done that, but like I said...us girls go through a phase of being really dumb."

His grin widened. He was glad that Nancy had finally pulled the stick out of her butt. This was the Nancy he remembered from the first time he'd met her. Five years back when she'd dressed up as an elf for their Elder Tree campaign. Back when she'd had braces on her teeth but it hadn't stopped her having the prettiest smile.

"To be honest..." Nancy went on, her face growing serious. "I'm looking forward to us being at the same school next year. After everything that we've been through I guess...I feel safer when we're all together. You know what I mean?"

"I know." He swallowed. "It's too bad Steve's graduating."

"How...how is Steve?" Nancy asked. "Are you guys still hanging out?"

"Yeah, yeah...Steve's the best! I've been helping him study. And he's been helping me with...with other stuff. He gave me a ride over here tonight."

Nancy's smile tightened. "He should've come in. I've got him a Christmas present but he's not giving me the chance to pass it on to him. At this rate, I'll have to ask Jonathan to deliver it. They talk to each other at school more than we do..." She sighs, shaking her head. "You know, just because we broke up...it didn't mean I wanted him out of my life. I miss him. Would...would you tell him that from me?"

"Sure, I'll tell him." But secretly Dustin was thinking that it might be

better not to give Steve any false hope that Nancy still had any kind of feelings for him. Secretly Dustin was thinking how he found it easier to hang around with Lucas than he did trying to talk to Max. Dustin knew it was hard to put away your feelings for a girl once they've chosen to be with another boy. His head had accepted that Max had picked Lucas. His heart was taking a little more time. I guessed it was the same for Steve.

"And listen, Dustin...just steer clear of girls and relationships for a couple more years, okay?" Nancy advised him, as if reading his mind. "Believe me, it's more trouble than it's worth. You're still too young for all that stuff."

Dustin snorted. "Tell that to your brother."

She rolled her eyes. "As if he'd listen...*God*, did you see the two of them out there?"

He nodded. "I couldn't help but look. Even if I hadn't been watching, I'd have felt the electricity from across the room."

"I'd like to say I'm happy for them," Nancy adds softly.

Dustin raised an eyebrow. "But...?"

"But...but how are they going to feel at the end of the night? When the dance is over and Hopper has to take Eleven back to that cold lonely cabin in the woods. Mike won't get to see her over Christmas or New Year. He won't even get a chance to call since those lab people are still tapping our phones. He'll only get to see her again when the Chief decides it's safe to set up their next meeting."

"But it's only for another year, right?" said Dustin. "Mike told me the Chief is working with that Doctor Owens guy to get El a new identity. A new life."

"Yeah, but with Mike?" She shook her head. "Dustin...my parents think Eleven is a dangerous Russian spy. Brenner and his people, they showed them her photograph. And sure we could tell them that Brenner lied, but...but is the truth any better? Do you think my parents are going to be okay with my little brother dating a super

weapon from a secret government lab? They have enough issues with me dating Jonathan.”

He frowned. “What don’t they like about Jonathan?”

“Nothing they’ll say to my face. They make nice when we have him over for dinner. But I’ve heard them talking late at night. I’ve heard them saying how they really wish I’d chosen a boy with better... *prospects*. Never mind that Jonathan always gets higher test scores than Steve. As far as they’re concerned I threw away my chance of being with a popular boy from a rich family with their own pool to be with a boy who lives in a battered little bungalow off a dirt road. That’s all that matters to them...” She grimaced, then forced a smile. “But hey, you don’t need to hear about my messed up family. Don’t let me put a downer on your night, okay? You get back out there and have fun with your friends. And don’t even bother with those stupid girls, okay? Trust me, they’re the last thing you need.”

He nodded, spooning the last of the pudding into his mouth, wondering if it was the last time he’d taste it. He headed back over to the school gym, just in time to hear that Tina Turner song that’d been hot in the charts and all over the radio that year, pumping out from the speakers. Listening to the words she sung, it seemed like Tina had some advice for him too.

*What's love got to do, got to do with it...  
Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken?  
I've been taking on a new direction, but I have to say,  
I've been thinking about my own protection.  
It scares me to feel this way...*

**9.17pm...**

“Hey Will...what happened to your girl?”

After returning to the hall, Dustin had actually been approached by a cluster of giggling girls who’d asked him for his next dance. It looked like Nancy taking pity on him had done the trick where Steve’s hairspray and scoring techniques had failed. They’d seen him dancing



with a high school babe and now they were suddenly interested. But after Dustin had gone through the motions with three of them, he'd quickly realized that they weren't really interested in him. Nancy was right. They were just another gang of bitchy girls who were using him to get at Stacey and her gang, since they'd rejected him earlier that evening. Dustin didn't want any part in their games. So he'd gone looking for his friends instead.

Will was the first one he'd found, sitting by himself and scribbling on the back of a paper plate.

"Huh?" asked Will, blinking up at him. "What girl?"

"The girl who asked you to dance earlier. Sally Birch, wasn't it?"

"Oh yeah. I...I don't really know her," said Will, sounding distant as he always did when startled out of his little dream world. "She told me that it was her friend who talked her into asking me. Apparently nobody had asked her to dance yet so...I think she was just looking for someone who wouldn't say no."

"Hey, don't say that! Maybe she really likes you."

"Or she felt sorry for me." Will shrugged. "Either way, it was nice of her to ask. It's nice to just feel normal, you know? But I wasn't really interested in her either."

"Not your type, huh?" He nodded, approvingly. "In that case you did the right thing, my friend. Not stringing her along, I mean."

Dustin realized that he was slipping back into his Steve Harrington impression. It felt like the best way to survive in this environment. Out on the dance floor they were still playing slow songs, couples songs. He stared out over the pairs of Middle School students, still swaying together. His eyes couldn't help falling on his first crush dancing with his best friend. Max was resting her chin on Lucas's shoulder while his hands had slipped down to her waist. They were both grinning like monkeys and Dustin found himself smiling too.

"Can't help but feel happy for them," Dustin admitted to Will in a hushed voice. "It hurts, but I'm happy for them."

Will raised his head from whatever he was scrawling on the paper plate. He followed Dustin's stare and then nodded, sympathetically.

"Yeah, I know what you mean," he said, before lowering his eyes down to his drawing.

Dustin frowned and then leaned over, curious. Will's picture was a pencil sketch of a couple dancing. And not just any couple.

"Is that Mike and El?" He raised an eyebrow, realizing what Will had just said to him. "Hey...do you like Eleven?"

"No," said Will, his cheeks reddening. "No, I don't..."

"Dude, you're blushing! You *do* like her."

"I hardly know her!"

"Yeah, but you're still drawing..."

Will was shaking his head slowly and deliberately. Dustin looked down at the picture again. And that's when he noticed that Eleven wasn't really the focus of Will's sketch. He'd drawn her from the side, so her face could hardly be seen. No, Will's picture centered very clearly on Mike. And in this picture, Mike didn't look like the scrawny frog-faced nerd that they all knew and loved. In Will's drawing he looked more like a Disney prince.

Will turned the plate over, but Dustin held his stare.

"Mike?" he murmured, no longer teasing. "Oh man, you like Mike..."

Will winced. "Please don't say anything."

Dustin nodded, assuring him. "Since...since when?"

He shrugged. "Since always I guess." He looked down at the plate under his hand. "Like...maybe those feelings were there all the time, but...but they only really came to the surface when I saw him with somebody else." He sighed, folding the plate in half. "Don't worry. I always knew that nothing could ever happen between us. Especially now..."

Dustin swallowed. "Does Mike know?"

"No! And he won't. Please, you can't tell him."

"I don't mean that. I mean have you ever..."

Dustin wasn't sure how to say it. He supposed the popular phrase was '*come out of the closet*' but he didn't know a lot about it. Still, Will *had* just come out to him and he suspected that this might be his first time he'd come out to anyone. Not that it felt like such a big deal. Dustin wasn't really surprised. Bullies at the school had always called Will those names – fag, fairy or whatever. But Dustin and his friends had never worried about whether it was true. It made no difference to them.

He supposed it made a pretty big difference to Will though.

"I've not told Mike *that* either," said Will, catching his meaning. "I'm not ready to tell anyone. I don't know why I even told you..."

Dustin shrugged. "I'm glad you did." He flashed Will a smile with his new pearls. "It's good to know I'm not the only third wheel in our party."

Will nodded. "Well, like you said...you can't help but be happy for them."

Dustin snorted, throwing up his hands. "Screw it. Maybe we should just hit the dance floor together?"

Will laughed at that. "Are you serious?"

"Why not?" he said, still beaming.

"Somehow I don't think Hawkins Middle is ready for two boys slow dancing together."

Dustin considered this. "Well if they're not, then screw them too." He held out his hand to Will. "Come on man...last month we were fighting shadow monsters and demodogs. Why should we be scared of some dumbass kids calling us queer?"

Will blushed again, shaking his head.

"I...I can't," he said. "But thanks for asking."

Dustin's heart sank a little. Then suddenly the music shifted tempo. The opening chords of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* came blasting out of the speakers and the kids on the dance floor erupted in cheers and whoops. Dustin looked out to see Lucas was already waving frantically for them to get on their feet and join him and Max.

"They're playing your song, Zombie boy," said Dustin.

"Okay," said Will. "We can dance together to this."

Will took Dustin's hand and they rushed out onto the floor. Lucas was already in position for the opening of the dance sequence. He was by far the best mover of their party. Dustin suspected that his friend must be recording Michael Jackson music videos from MTV and that he'd been secretly practicing to them. Lucas could do the moonwalk, the spin and the toe stand perfectly. The rest of them just staggered around like the walking dead behind him, their arms thrust out and their necks lolling as they laughed together.

After the first chorus, Lucas suddenly halted in his steps.

"Hey, where's Mike?" he asked, looking around. "We need Mike!"

Dustin's eyes swept the room also. He spotted Mike through the curtain of streamers. He was sitting on the bleachers in about the same spot where Dustin had been crying about an hour earlier. But unlike Dustin, Mike wasn't sitting alone. El was snuggled at his side, her head leaning into the crook of his neck and their fingers twined together. Mike was already shaking his head at them. Dustin gave him a quick thumbs up to signal that he understood that he'd be sitting this dance out. They all remembered Hopper's instructions that El needed to keep a low profile, so none of them were to draw attention to her. Dustin turned back to the group dance only to find Lucas stood with a dazed smile on his face.

Dustin realized Lucas was also staring at the secluded couple on the benches.

“Dude, she made it,” Lucas whispered in awe. “Mike finally got her to the ball.”

Apparently Lucas had been so wrapped up in Max that he'd missed El's entrance. Now that he'd seen her and Mike together he needed a moment to take it in. This victory. This little dream come true. Dustin had done the same thing when he'd first seen them together earlier that night. It was something to behold. Him and Lucas had both been there at that moment when Mike had made his audacious promise to El, right before they'd all almost been killed. They'd never really expected to see it become a reality.

Dustin slapped his friend on the arm. “Come on...don't blow her cover. Just keep on dancing.”

So they did. They went weird and wild on the dance floor while Mike and El watched them through the streamers and smiled. They all just kept smiling at each other. They couldn't help it. They'd all made it to the ball and there was nothing left to be scared of now. They'd survived.

*Cos this is thriller, thriller night...*

*...and no one's gonna save you from the beast about to strike...*

*You know it's thriller, thriller night...*

*You're fighting for your life, inside a killer thriller tonight...*

**10.14pm...**

“Hey Mr Clarke...what else needs cleaning up?”

Most of the other Middle School kids had been picked up by their parents fifteen minutes earlier. They'd all made a quick exit, keen to avoid being asked by a teacher to help with the tidying effort. The only volunteers were six stragglers who nobody had expected to show up the first place, Mr Clarke included probably. But he'd accepted their help filling garbage bags with plastic, paper and leftovers. Still, their science teacher was looking tired himself. He waved Dustin and the others towards the doors.

"You can leave the rest," Mr Clarke told them, fishing the keys from his pocket. "The janitors told me they'd take care of it over the holidays."

Dustin sighed. "Very well, my lord."

They all shuffled reluctantly out of the gym. They couldn't tell Mr Clarke that they would all have been happy to stay and clean till midnight if it meant that the dance didn't have to end so soon. But Dustin simply waved to Mr Clarke, wishing him a happy Christmas. Then he raised his eyebrows as his teacher got into a car with a strikingly beautiful Asian woman at the wheel.

"*Damn*, Mr Clarke," he said under his breath. "Didn't know you had it in you."

Dustin felt reassured. It seemed like nerds didn't have to end up lonely. He turned back to the school parking lot. The party were all there and not just the AV club. All the adults, older teens and escaped science experiments who had come together to defeat the Mind Flayer a month ago were here too. Looking at them now, you wouldn't think they had it in them either.

Hopper and Mrs Byers were leaning against her car, sharing a cigarette. Dustin hadn't seen Will's mom since Bob Newby's funeral, but he thought she was looking a good deal better now. She let Hopper finish their smoke and went to fuss over Will, which he accepted without embarrassment. A little way behind them, Steve sat on the hood of his car, his brow furrowed as he stared down at a textbook in his hands. Steve raised his head as Nancy and Jonathan approached him shyly, holding out a gift. Steve took the present with a flustered apology that he hadn't got them one in return. Dustin waved to Steve himself, rescuing him from this awkward moment. Everyone else started to splinter and move towards their respective cars. Jonathan squeezed Nancy's hand and then headed over to his mom and Will, while Nancy herself waved to Lucas and Max who she was giving a ride home in her parent's station wagon, along with her brother who was...

...Mike and El stood together in the middle of the parking lot, their faces buried in each other's shoulders, their arms locked around each

other's backs like they never wanted to let each other go. And Dustin felt certain that they never *ever* wanted to let each other go.

Hopper sighed, stamping out his cigarette and shuffling towards his police Chevy.

"Come on, kid," he called to El. "Time to call it a night."

Mike blinked, beginning to pull out of their hug. But El just tugged him back and clung to him tighter so Mike fell back into their needy embrace. For a moment it seemed like the Sheriff might have to forcibly separate them and drag his newly adopted daughter back home.

*Tonight is for Eleven*, Dustin thought again, remembering his words to Steve in the car.

"Uh Chief?" he said, nudging Steve in the ribs. "Is there time for one last dance?"

Steve caught on fast. "Yeah, yeah...I've got a boombox in my trunk."

Hopper frowned a moment, then nodded with a world weary sigh. Even if he had wanted to refuse this request then he would've quickly found himself outvoted. Mrs Byers was fast to jump on board with the idea, popping out a mixed tape of Christmas songs from her own car stereo and passing it to Steve to play. Will made a sweeping bow in front of his mom, offering his hand for a dance, which she took with a genuine teary smile. Jonathan and Nancy drifted back together, taking hands also to share a dance for the first time that evening. Lucas and Max were soon back in each other's arms too. Mike and El just held on, clinging to this moment for as long as they could.

Steve hit play and then pumped up the volume. The warm golden tones of Frank Sinatra's *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas* soon filled the cold school parking lot. Dustin would've recognized the voice anywhere. His mom loved Ol Blue Eyes. Hopper lit another cigarette and sidled up to join Steve and Dustin watching the others in their last dance of the night.

Steve slung an arm around Dustin and brought his mouth close to his ear.

“So tell me about it, stud...” his friend whispered. “Who’d you dance with? *Spill.*”

Dustin smirked back at him. “Only the prettiest girl in the room.”

Steve’s eyes widened. “Seriously?” he blurted. “Who?”

He held a finger to his lips. “A gentleman never tells. But you'd be the first to agree.”

Steve looked frustrated, but he nodded respectfully.

“Classy, my friend,” he said. “I like your style.”

“Well, I learned from the master,” Dustin reminded him.

They looked at each other and shared a smile. For two guys who were so unlucky in love they were doing well not to feel lonely. No, never in his life had Dustin felt *less* alone than he did among these people in this parking lot. This was the party right here. This was the party he never wanted to leave. He listened to the music and the old Christmas ballad went straight to his heart, like ol Frank was singing it for all of them.

*Here we are as in olden days, happy golden days of yore...  
Faithful friends who are dear to us, gather near to us once more...  
Through the years we all will be together...  
...if the fates allow. Hang a shining star upon the highest bow...  
...and have yourself a merry little Christmas now...*